

Report from Paris by Jean Baptiste Blondel

A blow against terrorism

"Let's terrorize the terrorists," declared Interior Minister Pasqua 16 months ago; and he's doing it—within the law.

A severe blow was inflicted against terrorism in France, when police forces backed up by special GIGN or other anti-terrorist squads, raided Basque and Corsican separatists' headquarters in the second half of February. On Feb. 19, the Iparretarrak group of Basque extremists was dismantled and its leader, Philippe Bidart, arrested with four cohorts, in the suburbs of Bayonne, in southern France.

Simultaneously, Interior Undersecretary Robert Pandraud in Corsica stated that "trust among the population must be restored by inflicting a severe blow to the FLNC," the Corsican "liberation front." One week later, on Feb. 27, it was this group's turn to be dismantled, when FLNC leader Jean-André Orsini and three other men were arrested in Corsica.

These separatists, funded by Libya's Qaddafi and deployed to the benefit of the Soviet Union's "irregular warfare" against the West, demand autonomy from the French state for the island of Corsica, and the Basque country, a region with distinct ethnic traditions overlapping France and Spain.

It's a good time to take stock of the French war on terrorism since the end of 1986, when Pasqua announced that he would "terrorize the terrorists." Whereas in 1986, France was deeply shaken by the many bombings and bloodbaths of September, the year 1987 was punctuated by several arrests of important terrorists. In February 1987, the four leaders of Direct Action, Jean-Marc Rouillan, Joelle Aubron, Nathalie Menigon, and Georges Cipriani, were picked up at

their residences and thrown in jail where their accomplices already resided.

During March and April, Mohamed Mouhajer, Fouad Ali Salah, and a crowd of other Iranian terrorists, all involved in bloody bombings, fell into the trap of the police. At that time, France broke its diplomatic relations with Iran, the "Wahid Gordji affair." A few weeks later, Luc Reinette and his fellows were arrested by the criminal police in the French West Indies, which rendered the "Caribbean Revolutionary Alliance" toothless.

And in November 1987, Direct Action explosives expert Max Frerot rejoined his comrades—in prison.

As for 1988, it has been Basque and Corsican separatists' turn so far: Former seminary student Philippe Bidart and his "co-religionists" Pierre Aguerre, Jean-Paul Hiribaren, and Joseph Etcheveste were caught by the GIGN on Feb. 19, and Jean-André Orsini, Dominique Bianchi, Bartholémy Massa and Jean-Michel Cardi were caught by the RAID on Feb. 27.

On Feb. 26, the third trial of Direct Action ended with heavy sentences: Jean-Marc Rouillan, the Halfen brothers, and Vincenzo Spano were sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment, while Regis Schleicher was sentenced to life. Many others are still in pre-trial custody.

Besides better coordination between various well-equipped French and foreign police and intelligence services, these successful operations were made possible by two things: a general consensus among the main French police forces on one hand, and

a strong political will by Charles Pasqua and Robert Pandraud on the other. This was embodied in Pasqua's "terrorize the terrorists," which nevertheless remained respectful of the law and did not lead to bloody police brutalities.

But it naturally triggered some hysteria from the "human rights" lobby, especially when Direct Action leaders began a hunger strike in their jail: One liberal outfit, the CIMADE, fretted about "the four people dying in the prisons of France," Amnesty International described their fate as "absolute torture," and over a hundred figures endorsed an advertisement published in the press to demand betterment of their detention conditions, in the name of human dignity. Among others, this advertisement was endorsed by the notorious 1960s student radical, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, and by Pierre Juquin, the presidential candidate of the French Communist Party.

Health Minister Michele Barzach and the President's wife Daniele Mitterrand pronounced themselves in a "moral dilemma." And Pierre Arpaillange, a state prosecutor reportedly close to Raymond Barre, the presidential hopeful of the Swiss insurance companies, complained that "the police are overriding justice." This magistrate's attack was aimed at Pasqua's and Justice Minister Chalandon's recent declarations about the "interest" and the "reasons of state."

The French government has yet to make the same crackdown on separatism in New Caledonia, where 17 gendarmes were recently taken hostage and nine wounded by Trotskyist-controlled separatists of the "Palika" group. This faction of the FLNKS "liberation" group supports Pierre Juquin's candidacy, and three of its European members were identified during the recent upheavals.